

**ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL WORKING PARTY**

**Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 2 May 2013 at 5.00 pm  
in Room GFR12, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds**

PRESENT: Councillor Thorndyke (Vice Chairman, in the chair)  
Councillors Chung, Clifton-Brown, Redhead and Stevens

BY INVITATION: Councillor Ray (Portfolio Holder for Performance and Resources)

**27. Substitutes**

The following substitution was declared:

Councillor Stevens, substituting for Councillor Mrs P A Warby.

**28. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Farmer and Mrs P A Warby.

**29. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2013 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**30. Declarations of Interests**

Members' declarations of interests are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

**31. Member Development: Update**

The Working Party considered Report D356 (previously circulated) which presented the results of the Training Needs Analysis (TNA) completed by Members since the previous meeting.

The Learning and Development Advisor provided details of training evaluation statistics December 2012 to March 2013 at Appendix B to the report, which showed an average attendance at training sessions of 8 Members, and details of Member attendance by activity at Appendix C.

Members had been advised at the previous meeting that it would shortly be time to commence commissioning a programme of training events for 2013/14, and to this avail a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) form was circulated to all Members on 25 February 2013, to be returned by 29 March 2013. At the same time, each Member was sent an individual learning record setting out the training events they had attended over the past year.

In all a total of 20 forms had been completed by Members, although one had been received too late to be included in the statistics at Appendix A to the report. Appendix A analysed how Members had assessed themselves against a range of skills, and their comments. The information had been split

into areas where Members had assessed their skill level as "low"; areas where Members had assessed their skill level as "low or medium"; areas which had scored 12 and 11 points; areas of training which had attracted the most comments requesting the training; and other areas of training requested by more than one Member. The Working Party was asked to use this information, alongside local and national priorities, to assist the Learning and Development Advisor to build a Member Development Programme for 2013/2014.

A discussion was held on areas which should be included in the Programme for 2013/2014. The Learning and Development Advisor advised that training for Members of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee had already been arranged, and also that any essential training on changing legislation would be slotted into the programme as it arose. The Learning and Development Advisor was asked to include the following areas of training in the Member Development Programme for 2013/2014:

- (1) Advanced Outlook;
- (2) Local Government Finance;
- (3) Development Control Committee – basic responsibilities of Ward Members;
- (4) Licensing and Regulatory Committee – general information for Ward Members;
- (5) Understanding the Organisation;
- (6) Electronic Communications (incorporating email usage and social media);
- (7) 6-monthly briefings on the Welfare Reform Act;
- (8) "Designated Persons" (to be slotted in when there is a suitable gap in the programme); and
- (9) Emergency Planning – via the e-learning platform, when this is available.



**RECOMMENDED:-**

***That the areas of training shown in (1) to (9) above be included in the 2013/14 Member Development Programme.***

**32. Amendment to the Constitution: Addition to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers**

The Working Party considered Report D357 (previously circulated) which suggested an addition to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

Members were aware that several new or amended policies or strategies were taken through Cabinet and/or full Council each committee cycle, and each time this occurred, it was necessary to give the relevant officer delegated authority, following consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to make minor amendments to the policy, in order to avoid bringing it back through Members each time a minor change was required.

It was suggested that it made more sense to make an addition to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers to authorise Chief Officers, following consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder(s), to make such amendments without having to request them each time a policy was amended.

Members agreed that this was a sensible way forward.



**RECOMMENDED:-**

***That the following delegation be added to the Scheme of Delegation to Officers at Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, for all Chief Officers:***

***"Following consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder(s), to make any minor typographical, grammatical, factual or contextual changes to any policies or strategies approved through Cabinet or full Council, provided they do not materially affect the meaning of the document".***

**33. Review of Petitions Scheme – E-Petition Facility**

The Working Party considered a narrative item which informed that the 2011 Localism Act had revoked the 2009 requirement for councils to have a petitions scheme.

Notwithstanding this relaxation in the legislation, it was suggested that the Borough Council retain its petitions scheme as this was an important democratic tool, and was used regularly. However, the freedoms and flexibilities offered by the 2011 Act also meant that the Council was no longer required to maintain its own electronic petitions (e-petitions) system on its website if a better digital alternative could be found. The Council's existing e-petitions system was provided under a contract which ended in December 2013 and must be renewed/cancelled by September 2013. The annual cost of the contract was currently around £1,900 a year.

Members were advised that the possibility of alternatives could be explored when a decision was made whether or not to renew the current software, within the existing budget. The process of choosing and implementing software was a matter routinely delegated to officers under the Council's constitution. However, as a matter of housekeeping, it may be necessary to amend the petitions scheme in the Constitution to implement any new e-petitions system (in-house or externally hosted). This was simply because the current scheme included instructions to petitioners which reflected the process dictated by the existing software.

Accordingly, it was



**RECOMMENDED:-**

***That the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised, in consultation with the Chairman of the Democratic Renewal Working Party and the relevant Portfolio Holder, to amend and update the Petitions Scheme in the Council's Constitution to reflect any future changes in the electronic petitions (e-petitions) process required by a change or improvement in software or technology, provided that such changes maintain accessibility to the scheme and are consistent with the existing guidelines and terms and conditions regarding validity, transparency and privacy.***

### **34. Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee: Approval of the Council's Annual Accounts**

The Working Party considered Report D358 (previously circulated) which advised that a recent review of the framework for reporting performance and financial information to Members had considered the role of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee (PASC) and its powers concerning the Council's Statement of Accounts.

Currently the Statement of Accounts was considered by PASC before it was presented for approval by full Council. It had been confirmed that PASC may both receive and have the authority for approving the Council's Annual Statement of Accounts, thus removing the necessity for that decision to be ratified by full Council, although the Committee may wish to report its decision to Council for noting.

This suggestion would require a suitable change to be made to PASC's delegated powers in the Council's Constitution. A similar change was being made to the powers of Forest Heath District Council's Performance and Audit Committee. Approval for a recommendation to make a specific change to the powers of the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee was therefore sought.



#### ***RECOMMENDED:- That***

- (1) the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee be given delegated powers to approve the Council's Statement of Accounts; and***
- (2) the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be given delegated authority to make the necessary changes to the Council's Constitution.***

### **35. Members' Attendance Statistics: 2012/2013**

The Working Party considered Report D359 (previously circulated) which presented Members' attendance statistics for 2012/2013.

The publication of the statistics was accompanied by a list of the activities undertaken by the Councillors as recorded in the statistics, and also those activities undertaken by Councillors carrying out their roles but which were not included in the statistics.

An annual report had traditionally been presented to the relevant meeting of the Democratic Renewal Working Party, and covered the period 1 April to 31 March each year.

Members found the report interesting, but questioned the purpose of the statistics, which were simply a list of major committee meetings attended by Members, but took no account of the dozens of other briefings, meetings and training events which may be attended by Members, or their work in their wards. The Working Party was concerned that due to the limitations of the figures, they could be misleading, and suggested that the report not be produced for future years.

RESOLVED:-

That, due to the scope of the report not covering the full duties and responsibilities of Councillors, statistics of Members' attendance at formal meetings not be compiled for future years.

**36. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Working Party confirmed the following meeting dates: -

Thursday 12 September 2013;  
Monday 2 December 2013;  
Thursday 13 February 2014; and  
Thursday 8 May 2014.

All meetings to commence at 5.00 pm.

The meeting concluded at 5.58 pm.

**CHAIRMAN**

